

Desire the Root of Suffering

Bhante Bodhidhamma · DhammaBytes · 12:52

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sama Sambuddhasa Namō Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sama Sambuddhasa
Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sama Sambuddhasa Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed Noble and fully self-enlightened.

This particular passage is called the visible origins and passing away of suffering. But the reason I want to use it in this little section which is about approaching the Dharma is that it gives us an even clearer view of how the Buddha taught. It's just nice to see how he very carefully guides people to understanding and reinforces it.

So I'll read through and then we'll stop for little comments. So on one occasion, the Blessed One was dwelling at the town of the Melians named Uruvelacapa. Then Bhadraka, the headman, approached the Blessed One, paid homage to him, sat down to one side and said it would be good venerable sir if the blessed one would teach me about the origin and passing away of suffering.

If headman I were to teach you about the origin and passing away of suffering with reference to the past saying so it was in the past, perplexity and uncertainty about that might arise in you. And if I were to teach you about the origin and passing away of suffering with reference to the future saying so it will be in the future, perplexity and uncertainty about what might happen might arise in you. Instead, headman, while I'm sitting right here and you're sitting right there, I'll teach you about the origin and passing away of suffering. Now listen and attend closely and I will speak.

Remember, these are all remembered and it captures the manner in which they spoke to each other. Yes, venerable sir.

The Blessed One said now what do you think headman are there any people in Uruvelacapa on whose account sorrow lamentation pain dejection and despair would arise in you if they were to be executed in prison fined or censured? Well there are such people when it was there. But are there any people in Uruvelacapa on whose account sorrow, lamentation, pain, dejection and despair would not arise in you in such event? There are such people. So why is it, headman, that in relation to some people in Uruvelacapa, sorrow, lamentation, pain, dejection and despair would arise in you if they were to be executed, imprisoned, fined or censured, while in regard to others they would not arise in you?

Well, those people in Uruvelacapa, Venerable Sir, in relation to whom sorrow, lamentation, pain, dejection and despair would arise in me if they were executed, imprisoned, fined or censured, these are the ones for whom I have a desire and attachment. And for those in relation to whom they would not arise in me, these

are the ones I have no desire and attachment. Probably the opposite.

Headman, by means of this principle that is seen, understood, immediately attained, fathomed, apply the method to the past and the future thus. Whatever suffering arose in the past, all that arose rooted in desire, with desire as its source, for desire is the root of suffering. Whatever suffering will arise in the future, all that will arise rooted in desire, with desire as its source, for desire is the root of suffering.

And you get this and the usual great praise. He's wonderful venerable, it's amazing venerable sir, how well that was stated by the Blessed One. And then he tells the Buddha what he just heard. Whatever suffering arises all that is rooted in desire has desire at its source for desire is the root of suffering. That's what therapists do, isn't it? They listen to you and then they tell you what they've just heard. So he's pretty good to tell the Buddha that in fact he's just heard what he said.

Now you'll notice here that the Buddha always starts with what a person can experience right here and now. So he doesn't start talking about suffering and pain in the past like why did it happen in the past, now I've got this pain, if I do this, what will happen? He brings it right down to the very present, to the very present now, and he's just asking a very simple question. If anybody whom you have a love for, an attachment for, were to suffer some sort of misfortune, would you suffer for them? Yeah, I would. But of course, other people whom you don't know, or those people whom you dislike, as a result, you might rejoice.

So very quickly brings the person to understand this role of desire. Now remember that whenever we're talking about desire we're always talking about a specific type of desire because translating words from one language into another is always very difficult to get the exact translation. This desire is translating the word *taṇhā*, and *taṇhā* is the desires that we have based on wrong understanding, and that wrong understanding is seeking happiness in something which is not going to deliver basically that. And what happens is we form a psychological dependency on something and that's where the problem lies.

So desires to do with wanting to become liberated, desires coming out of a pure act of love or a pure act of generosity or an act of compassion or joy like giving somebody a present for their birthday but doing it just for the joyfulness of it to increase the other person's joy, all those desires are to our benefit. They make the heart grow. But as soon as something creeps in there which is to do with I give a present so somebody will like me, then I'm into a relationship which eventually can cause me suffering.

So now he wants to reinforce that. So now he gets to be more personal. So this man repeats to the Buddha, right, well, this is the root of desire. And then he tells him, he says, look, Venerable Sir, I have a son called Chirovati. So now this man, in his insight, is now linking it to the relationship he has to his son, who stays at an outside residence. And I rise early and send a man, saying, go, man, and find out how Chiravasi is. And until that man returns, Venerable Sir, I'm upset, thinking, I hope Chiravasi has not met with any affliction. So there's a parent's worry.

And what do you think, headman, replies the Buddha, if Chiravasi were to be executed in prison, fined or censured, would sorrow, lamentation, pain, dejection and despair arise in you? Venerable sir, if Chiravasi were to be executed in prison, fined or censured, even my life would seem futile. So how could sorrow, lamentation, pain, dejection and despair not arise in me? In this way, too, headman, it's to be understood. Whatever suffering arises, all that arises rooted in desire, with desire as its source, for desire is the root of suffering.

Now, you have to make these statements, you have to repeat them and let them sink in. They have to be digested. What the Buddha is saying is, whatever suffering arises, all that arises rooted in desire. You have to keep repeating that. Remember, suffering is not the same as pain, physical pain. That's a given. But whatever suffering arises, all that arises rooted in desire. With desire as its source, for desire is the root of suffering.

These phrases have a real power when you just gently repeat them to yourself in the quietness, in some way in which you can feel the digestion. You don't have to think about it, because it's going in, it's like osmosis, you're absorbing it, and it's actually beginning to change your attitude by doing that. That's the way spiritual reading works. You don't have to think about it.

And then he wants to really drive it home. This is the final nail. What do you think, headman? Before you saw your wife or heard about her, did you have any desire, attachment or affection for her? No, venerable sir. Then was it, headman, only when you saw her or heard about her that this desire, attachment and affection rose in you? Yes, venerable sir.

Now what do you think, headman? If your wife were to be executed, imprisoned, fined or censured, would sorrow, lamentation, pain and despair arise in you? Venerable sir, if my wife were to be executed, imprisoned, fined and censured, even my life would seem futile. So how could sorrow, lamentation, pain, dejection and despair not arise in me? He drives home the point. Well, in this way too, headman, it's to be understood. Whatever suffering arises all that is rooted in desire with desire as its source for desire is the root of suffering.

So there's something about the oral tradition where you repeat it and repeat it and repeat it, and these phrases if you when you read the scriptures, when you come across a phrase which catches you, and it doesn't have to be the scriptures, it could be any spiritual work, and a phrase catches you, or a sentence catches you, or even a small paragraph, and you think, that's interesting, don't think of it, just keep repeating it, keep repeating it.

And you find that you keep going back to it, it's like a piece of music, and then eventually you get fed up with it. And at that point, you know it's been digested. And then it comes out in funny ways. It actually changes the way you think. It comes out, as it were, through the back entrance. And that's a beautiful way. This is the way that the Benedictines, that's their *Lectio Meditatio*, isn't it? *Contemplatio*. I think that's right. So they read. And they do this repetition business. And then they sit in stillness. If thoughts come up, it's

fine. It's not as though you're trying not to think. But what you want to do is to absorb these little sentences that you find. Little paragraphs.

There we are. Suffering is rooted in desire. Second noble truth. I can only hope that these words have finally driven home the truth. Suffering is in fact rooted in desire. And hopefully you'll work towards your liberation and find *Nibbāna* sooner rather than later.

Sādhu, sādhu, sādhu.

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